

Voters First Advisory Commission

Workshop

Tuesday September 4, 2007

Room 138, State House

Commission Members Present:

Secretary of State A. Ralph Mollis

Senator June Gibbs

Ken McGill, Pawtucket Board of Canvassers

Sue Stenhouse, Governor's Deputy Director of Community Relations

Roger Harris, RI Vote Project

Jan Ruggiero, Director, Secretary of State's Elections Division

Staff Members Present:

Paul Caranci, Deputy Secretary of State

Pam Lombardi, Administrative Assistant

Chris Barnett, Communications Director

Mark Welch, Esquire

General Public Present:

Amy Vitale, ACLU

Summary of Meeting:

- 1. Secretary Mollis opened the meeting at 1:00 P.M.**
- 2. Paul Caranci distributed the following handouts for the**

Commissioners notebooks:

a. Meeting agenda

b. Written comments from the City & Town Clerk's Association, Elections Committee

c. Summary of comments received at public hearings and written comments received.

3. Evaluation of the public hearings

a. Commissioner Stenhouse – The Commission hearing process worked well and our message got out to the community, particularly the community of those with disabilities who attended every hearing. Going forward, it would be better if we didn't have meetings in the summer because of conflicts with vacation schedules. Better to hold the hearings when people are back in business mode.

b. Commissioner Kando – Questioned whether we are going to hold more hearings this year. Secretary Mollis explained that the 2007 hearing process is complete, but we will continue into the year 2008 to discuss issues raised other than the initial 10-point agenda.

c. Commissioner Stenhouse asked for a definition of the Commissions role from this point forward. Secretary Mollis explained that we are not looking for all Commissioners to agree to submit legislation, but simply answering the question "if legislation is submitted, what should it look like?" Commissioner Stenhouse suggested that the Commission will create "standards" for what legislation should contain.

d. Commissioner Stenhouse suggested that in the future, speakers should let the Commissioners know if they are speaking as

individuals or if they are representing a group.

4. Paul Caranci summarized each of the items of the 10 point agenda noting how many people spoke or submitted written comments on each issue and how many were in favor or opposed to the issue if applicable. Commissioner Stenhouse noted that two of the issues were missing from the report; the expansion of the 50' no canvassing zone and voting booth privacy. Mr. Caranci said it was probably a copy error and a new summary would be e-mailed to all Commissioners.

5. Subcommittee Assignments

a. The following subcommittee assignments were made

i. Early Voting = Stenhouse and McGill

ii. Straight Party Ticket = Gibbs and Stenhouse

iii. Voter Roll Cleanup/Registration = Ruggiero and Kando

iv. Photo ID = Brien, Almeida, Stenhouse and Harris

v. Uniform Training & Compensation of Poll Worker = Kando and McGill

vi. No Excuse Absentee Voting = McGill and Caranci

vii. Voting Booth Privacy = Mollis, Caranci and Kando

viii. Expansion of 50' No Canvassing Zone = Caranci, Harris and Welch

b. Mr. Caranci noted that while these Commissioners have volunteered to serve on the designated Subcommittees, other Commissioners are encouraged to serve on any Subcommittee on which they have an interest.

c. Subcommittees were asked to meet over the next two weeks

(Please Note: It was initially thought that a phone meeting would suffice, but we have since been informed that the Subcommittee meetings must conform to the requirements of the open meetings law. That means that we need to post them 48 hours in advance of the meeting and meetings must be held in person in a room that is accessible to those with disabilities. Therefore, please contact Pam Lombardi 222-1035 with a date, time and place of any proposed meeting so that we may post it 48 hours in advance of the meeting.)

i. Subcommittee members should conduct their own research, including, but not limited to, best practices from around the Country, and then meet as often as is deemed necessary to develop a white paper.

ii. Secretary Mollis and Commissioner Stenhouse requested that all White Papers begin with a copy of the applicable state law as it is currently written and include the reason(s) why the issue is being discussed, a summary of the comments received and an statement in support of the position and a statement in opposition to the position as well as recommendations of the Subcommittee on what standards reform legislation should include at a minimum.

6. Commission Work Session

a. Expansion of the 50' No Canvassing Zone:

i. Secretary Mollis suggested that there didn't seem to be a very large public outcry for expansion of the zone but that there did seem to be a desire to clarify the current law through additional legislation or through rules and regulations. Various Commission members noted that some of the problems include harassment of the voters, breach

of the 50' zone, no clear delineation of the 50' zone. It was suggested that packages be prepared for all candidates that would address election-day conduct with regard to candidates and their supporters and poll workers. After the discussion, it was a consensus that a white paper would be written by the appropriate Subcommittee that would include suggestions on how to improve the current law and rules and regulations working within the framework of the current 50' zone.

7. Poll Worker Training:

a. Commissioner Harris indicated that his experience is that some poll workers don't address people with disabilities such as hearing impairment. Even though many may read lips, the poll worker tends to address the person that he is with. Also, an interpreter should be available for quick dispatch to a particular polling place if one is needed at that poll. Bob Cooper has a good training video on how poll workers should deal with people with disabilities. This should become part of the poll worker training.

b. Senator Gibbs suggested that a handbook with an easy-to-follow index be provided to each poll worker during training. Commissioner Kando indicated that such a handbook is being developed.

c. Senator Gibbs and Commissioner Kando also suggested that there should be more state inspectors available and at a good compensation. Commissioner McGill noted that poll worker compensation minimum should be raised as opposed to a uniform compensation. Commissioner Kando said that a uniform compensation prevents a municipality from offering to pay more

money if they are unable to get enough qualified workers for elections. It was also suggested that we reach out to political science professors at local colleges for poll workers.

d. Secretary Mollis and Paul Caranci will draft white paper language on item c above and provide it to Commissioners Kando and McGill for use in their Subcommittee.

8. The workshop adjourned at 2:48 P.M.

The next Commission Workshop is tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, September 26, 2007 at 2:00 P.M. at the State House in a room to be determined.